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Breaking Ground

ANNUAL SUMMER ARTS ISSUE • NUMBER EIGHT • SEPTEMBER 2002

The Newsletter of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities



"Mind, Body, Spirit" by Erin Brady Worsham

Erin Brady Worsham (above)

"Mind, Body, and Spirit" was originally done as three pieces, writes Erin Brady Worsham. (They have appeared in the Muscular Dystrophy Association *Quest Magazine*.) Ms. Worsham, of Nashville, is a graduate of the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute™, Class of 2001-02.

John Gentry (left)

John Gentry lives in Knoxville and receives residential services from Sunrise Communities of Tennessee. John enjoys crafts, painting, drawing, and cake decorating. He writes songs and sings in church.

Laurie Soileau (opposite page)

Of her art, Laurie Soileau says, "Thematically, my mixed-media work deals with living with depression, attention deficit disorder, and my desire to broaden 'everyman's' understanding of such disabilities. In 'The Milky Way' the dark sky represents despair. But then the clouds open to the starlight, and hope reappears. I am passionate about using art media to communicate between the neuroscience community and the lay community." Ms. Soileau lives in Nashville.



"Untitled" by John Gentry

fineartsfinearts

J. William Myers (below)

Sofia Maneschi writes, "A couple of months ago Bill Myers (a friend of my parents) told me about a mural he was working on for the Vanderbilt Law School depicting many 'firsts' in law. I asked if he was including the Americans with Disabilities Act, and he said he hadn't thought about it. He called me the next day and said it was a good idea and asked me if I would model. That's me in the lower right corner." Ms. Maneschi is grants coordinator for the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee.



"The Milky Way" by Laurie Soileau



"Equal Justice Under Law" by J. William Myers

Folktale Comes to Life at Crafts Center

By Joyce Elaine Sievers

“Who’s in Rabbit’s House?”, an art show created by adults at Pacesetters in Cookeville, has been on display this summer at the Appalachian Center for Crafts. The materials are the culmination of a 27-week multimedia project developed with the participation of visual artist Merritt Ireland and storyteller Marcia Donovan. Pacesetters is a private, nonprofit agency providing supports for adults with mental retardation.

“Who’s in Rabbit’s House?” is based on a folktale from the Masai tribe of East Africa. Pacesetters and Ms. Donovan presented the story at the Putnam County Library and Putnam County Center last spring.

The props for the storytelling center around the animals in this story. This artwork includes large fabric paintings and more than 30 smaller appliqué collages, animal masks, and oil pastels of the animals.

For the past two years, the Tennessee Arts Commission has supported “Painting the Tale.” “Who’s in Rabbit’s House?” is the tale chosen for the current project. The Commission’s funds were matched by dollars from Pacesetters. Grants from the Cookeville Arts Council and the Highland Rim Chapter of the Tennessee Association of Craft Artists provided additional support for the exhibition. In February and March 2002 Vanderbilt University’s John F. Kennedy Center was host to the exhibition of artwork from the first year of “Painting the Tale.”

The Appalachian Center for Crafts is located at 1560 Crafts Center Drive, Smithville, Tennessee 37166. For more information, contact Gail Luper at the Center, telephone (931) 372-3051.

Joyce Elaine Sievers is family support coordinator at Pacesetters, Inc. and a member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.



Leonard Roberts with his oil pastel elephant mask and fabric collage piece from “Who’s in Rabbit’s House?”



Individuals from the Putnam County Center pose against a backdrop of some more artwork from "Who's in Rabbit's House?" Pictured left to right: Mike Rewis, Mike Pollard, Kenneth Billinsly, Donald Lowe (seated), Bobby Davis (behind Donald), Lewis Fox, Gary Terry, and Chuck Henson.

Merritt Ireland comments on the work of several of the Pacesetter artists

Patricia Brawner is the artist who has worked the longest and most consistently in the "Painting the Tale" program. A scholarship student at the Appalachian Center for Crafts, she has a good sense of design and is dedicated to completing each art project. Three of her fabric paintings are in



Patricia Brawner

'Who's in Rabbit's House?' Two of her pieces were purchased for the permanent collection of the John F. Kennedy Center at Vanderbilt after the 'Painting the Tale' exhibit there last year.

A hard worker in the art program since it began, **Leonard Roberts** has a good sense of design and color. Leonard's oil pastel of the elephant was selected as the elephant mask for "Who's in Rabbit's House?"



Leonard Roberts

Even though Leonard does not talk, his whole body expresses the magic and joy of life, and he was a delight in the production. Leonard has sold his fabric collage piece from "Who's in Rabbit's House?" and one of his pieces was purchased for the Kennedy Center's permanent collection.

Mike Rewis has become a consistent participant in Pacesetters' art program when he learned that it was possible to make money selling his work. Last winter, when he saw one of



Mike Rewis

his charcoal drawings framed at the Kennedy Center, he began to have a new appreciation for what he could do. He turned out a wonderful oil pastel for the rabbit of "Who's in Rabbit's House?", which was selected as the face mask for the performance. (Ed. note: *Breaking Ground* reproduces this drawing

on the cover of this issue.) Next he tried his hand at fabric collage appliqué. He cut most of the pieces and glued them himself. The result was quite charming, and it was chosen for the postcard announcement of the exhibit.

Mike sold his framed charcoal drawing the week before the opening of "Who's in Rabbit's House?" On receiving the check, he exclaimed, "I won! I won! I know it's not a contest but it feels the same as winning." When his fabric collage rabbit sold less than two weeks later, he rolled his eyes and said it was unbelievable.

Paul Brhel is a new artist in the program. He has a good sense of design and basic drawing skills and good potential for becoming a true folk or outsider artist. Paul helped in the fabric painting for the mask of the jackal in "Who's in Rabbit's House?". He also tried his hand at performing as the frog in the story. He has since sold one of his fabric collages at the Appalachian Center exhibit.

touchthesky

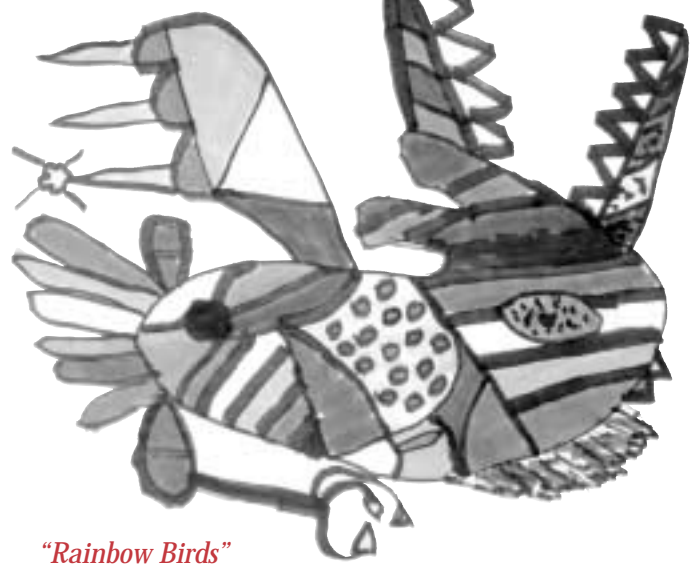
Touch the Sky!

By Susan Eaton

Nashville's Madison School is a public school, grades K-12, for youngsters with diverse learning abilities. In the winter of 2000, the students of Madison produced a multi-arts project, "Touch the Sky," in collaboration with the John F. Kennedy Center at Vanderbilt University. The project comprised two parts. A musical drama was staged at the Madison School in March. Following this, from July through October, student paintings, drawings, and photographs about the musical drama production were exhibited at the Kennedy Center. Madison School, its students, parents, faculty, and administrators had never been involved in a performing arts project of this scope. All saw "Touch the Sky" as an opportunity to address the artistic development needs of students with disabilities, and each group committed early to a high-quality production.

It all begins with a song. Madison music teacher Adele Smith had composed the songs for "Touch the Sky" prior to this project. A grant from the Metro Nashville Arts Commission allowed Ms. Smith and art teacher Linda Schuder to collaborate with professional artists. Andrew Krichels, an internationally acclaimed dancer and choreographer, worked with the students to create original choreography. Denice Hicks, an immensely popular actress among Nashville theatergoers, lent her expertise early in the project to help create the dramatic story line. Brian Hill, a theater and film professional and Madison School parent, staged the final production.

The greater Nashville community was generous in its support. Mr. Hill was able to secure donations of professional lighting, sound, and sets from ACT I, Bradfield Stage Lighting, Drops Everything, and Nashville Children's Theater. A grant from the Metropolitan Nashville Public Education Foundation, secured by Ms. Smith, allowed the purchase of some fine rhythm instruments. In addition, the art exhibit at the Kennedy Center was professionally curated by Lain York, and Madison students received help from Kennedy Center community relations



"Rainbow Birds"
by Jesh Bunton from "Touch the Sky"

experts Jan Rosemergy and Elise McMillan, and photographer Larry Wilson.

Kind of cool. As anyone familiar with stagecraft knows, there's a world of activity behind the scenes. Students put their ideas, imagination, and paints into set design and construction. They helped install the sound and lighting systems, designed the costumes and programs. Students also were involved in publicizing the musical drama so that the community would know about the good work. One publicity event involved an article in a Nashville newspaper, *The Tennessean*. The novel experience of being interviewed by a professional journalist challenged the students to articulate their experiences and the personal meaning of the project. An example is one student's comment: "I like to do stuff with my hands and body. I'm very active, so I really enjoy this. But I never imagined myself being a dancer. Andrew got me into this. It's kind of cool."

After long, hard work throughout the fall and winter, it all came together. The dancers, musicians, singers, and narrators of "Touch the Sky" staged two performances of the musical drama that were attended by more than 300 people. Metro Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell was among the guests, and he presented each student with personal congratulations and a rose following the performance. Then, from July to October, over 1,000 people viewed the art and photography exhibit at Vanderbilt's Kennedy Center. The art exhibit reception at the Kennedy Center in September was broadcast on radio, and included a panel discussion by an art teacher, a parent, and an arts researcher.

The most important outcomes. There were many measures of the project's success. Three of the most important outcomes were in community awareness, aesthetic development, and social relationships.

Community awareness. Students with disabilities comprise a group that is clearly underserved in arts education. In addition, students lack role models of professional artists with disabilities because such talented individuals are unsupported. The process of applying for financial and in-kind contributions from public agencies, local businesses, and other nonprofit agencies provided opportunities for education of the Nashville community about disabilities and the arts.

Aesthetic development.

The high quality of the personnel and materials associated with this project were of greatest importance. If true aesthetic development is to occur, students must have access to the very best in teachers, artists, and materials. The variety of art domains—painting and drawing, set design and lighting, writing, singing, musical instrumentation, dramatic narrative, dance—provides abundant opportunities for students' growth and development.

Because they were given this opportunity to engage in a wide variety of art experiences, students were able to choose the ones they felt most confident developing. Thus, each student was able to find satisfaction in at least one arts activity. In addition to visual and performing arts, some students took part in the project in ways that developed or strengthened skills in the literary arts. For example, a few wrote essays reflecting on the experience. In future projects of this type, language teachers could be enlisted early in the project to involve students in structured poetry sessions or regular journal writing over the weeks and months of the project.

Social relationships. The development of social skills is not associated particularly with arts programs. Participation in any number of projects that are attractive to students (e.g., sports or community service) can also nurture social relationships. Nevertheless, social skills development is a critical need for students with disabilities, and students had numerous opportunities to apply social skills during "Touch the Sky," and teachers and parents reported unexpected enthusiastic attitudes and behaviors. The students focused intensely on working together to create a program that they could confidently

present to the community. This comment from the musical drama program illustrates one student's spirit: "I am going to be a singer in the play, and my brother will work the stage crew... We are rehearsing until the big night arrives, and so far, everything's been going smoothly. I'm sure everything will be fine, and everybody will have a great time!"



Untitled by John Bryan, from "Touch the Sky"

The project was highly productive. Students were involved in a complex project over an extended period of time; there were more opportunities for student and community involvement; and the risk of project failure was diminished because strong outcomes balanced weaker areas. Madison School administrators have expressed support for mounting more such projects in the coming years. There also has been interest among professional artists, teachers, and administrators at other schools in the Nashville area to mount other multi-arts projects.

Susan Eaton, Ed.D., research associate in the Department of Special Education at Vanderbilt University, served as project manager for "Touch the Sky." Dr. Eaton currently is involved in pre-school arts programs. She also serves on the board of the recently-established VSA Tennessee (formerly Very Special Arts).

It's Front and Center for the Night Fever Dancers

By Brenda Farley

On an evening back in December 2001, five young people with Down syndrome entertained a packed house in Memphis with a rockin' performance to "Saturday Night Fever." It had been preceded by an emotional performance to the music of Celine Dion's "The Prayer," featuring intriguing sign language and graceful choreography.

The occasion marked the 15th anniversary of Special Kids and Families. These awesome performers were five of the seven youngsters who had been in the first graduating class of the Special Kids early intervention program. All seven, now 15 years of age, attend area schools.

The performance was such a success that parents and guests suggested that the group might stay together and continue as an ongoing dance ensemble. The dancers, their parents, and instructor Darlene Winters were all interested—but two months passed and nothing happened.

Everyone was for the dream, but who could make it a reality? I knew in my heart that if the troupe was going to come into being, someone had to step

forward and take the lead. Realizing that God was leading me to implement this program, I thought, "If God led me to this, He would direct me through it."

Thus we began the Night Fever Dancers.

Mrs. Darlene Winters, who is a speech pathologist, special educator, dancer, and advocate for children with special needs, agreed to volunteer her time as lead teacher.

Another friend of these children, and a very involved advocate, Father Eric Peterson of St. Francis of Assisi Church, offered a hall for weekly practice. Finally, we obtained a non-profit status by affiliating with the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid-South.

Practice began in early March. Later in the spring we gave two public performances, then prepared for a really big show at the National Down Syndrome Society Convention, which took place on July 5. We are scheduled to entertain at the annual conference of RISE (Restructuring for Inclusive Schools) in October, and we have five more bookings set before the end of the year.

About the troupe. The Night Fever Dancers comprises twelve high school students from Memphis and the mid-South. The youngest is 14, the oldest 19. Each has a developmental disability. Nine of the dancers have Down syndrome. All are learning basic dance, since only three had had previous training. Their interests range from modern to jazz to lyrical.

All the dancers are achieving great team interaction, improving their physical coordination, and developing their own identity even as they contribute to a cohesive group. The overall emphasis is on dance, stage presence, drama, and self-esteem.

My vision is to help the Night Fever Dancers attain a recognized high level of professional capability and achievement and to see the program grow as more audiences invite them to entertain. As a parent who wants opportunities and adventures for our children, I look toward bringing forward a younger group to train who can step up to fill places as our present dancers move on to new opportunities and options in adulthood.

The Night Fever Dancers:

Amanda Cash	Rebecca Daniels
John T. Farley	Natalie Goff
David Hardin	Laurie Hobson
Mike Josel	Tim McNatt
Kendra Rudy	Kenny Thielemier
Clark Tompkins	Nicole Valentine

The Night Fever Dancers are available to perform at conferences, conventions, and other events. We are in need of sponsors, costumes, and financial donations, which are tax-deductible. For further information, please contact us at 8197 Greenbelt, Memphis, Tennessee 38125, telephone (901) 756-8026.

Brenda Farley is director of Night Fever Dancers and is a graduate of the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute™, Class of 1995-96.

Right: Father Eric Peterson (center) and the Night Fever Dancers take a break after the troupe shoots its first video.



Tennessee VSA Has Ambitious Agenda

By Lori Kissinger

Very Special Arts (VSA) is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting artistic excellence and providing educational opportunities through the arts for children and adults with disabilities. VSA attempts to build bridges between individuals with disabilities and the community. It does so by using the arts to help develop learning skills, encourage independence, promote inclusion, and positively shape lives that disability threatens to restrict or limit.

Founded in 1974 by Jean Kennedy Smith as an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the organization offers comprehensive programs in music, dance, drama, creative writing, and the visual arts. VSA affiliates implement these programs across the United States and in 83 countries worldwide. Here at home, among the fifty states, only Tennessee has not had a VSA affiliate in recent years. Yet 20% of the state's 5.7 million residents—more than 1.1 million people—have a disability, according to the Tennessee Disability Information and Referral Office, citing Census Brief CENBR/97-5, December 1997.

Last fall VSA enlisted Lori Kissinger to take the lead in forming a Tennessee affiliate. Ms. Kissinger had served as executive director for a regional arts council in Indiana for more than 11 years. A musician, she had received training from VSA to work in educational settings. She

accepted the challenge and persuaded Middle Tennessee State University to act as the new affiliate's fiscal agent until it could obtain nonprofit status.

In its first action step, VSA Tennessee conducted a needs assessment to determine the scope and content of current arts programming for Tennesseans with disabilities and gaps that might exist in these offerings. Tennessee VSA has also begun recruiting board members, writing bylaws, and developing a long-range plan. The latter calls for programs and services to begin in Middle Tennessee in 2003, these to expand throughout the state in 2004.

Some of the first services will include:

- Making grants for arts projects that serve people with disabilities
- Providing banks of tickets to organizations that serve people with disabilities
- Presenting Young Soloist and Young Playwright Awards, the winners to participate in national competition
- Sponsoring training opportunities for educators and artists
- Curating art exhibitions that promote better understanding of disabilities
- Publishing a quarterly newsletter

To learn more about VSA Tennessee or to become involved, contact Lori Kissinger at (615) 826-5252 or userk7706@aol.com.

The Autism Society of Middle Tennessee and Vanderbilt University's John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development tentatively plan to sponsor an exhibit of art by Tennessee children and adults with autism, April-June 2004.

EVENT

Exhibit
of art by
Tennesseans
with Autism

MAY

APRIL

2004


200

JUNE

2004

EVENT

Interested persons should contact Leisa Hammett-Goad in care of the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee, 480 Craighead Street, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37204; (615) 385-2077; asmt@bellsouth.net.



Masks created by Lyndsey Garth, 17 (left) and Bryan Grant, 11 (below), two participants in Club Discovery.

Club Discovery Widens the World for Youngsters with Visual Impairments

By Shannon Johnson

Club Discovery, at Chattanooga's Creative Discovery Museum, is an after-school program that provides quality educational experiences for children with visual impairments, age 8 to 17, and their friends. The program fills a need among these youngsters, who often cannot take advantage of field trip opportunities offered to other students.

Club Discovery began with 15 enrollees, who were each asked to invite a friend to take part. These students came to the museum for a two-hour program each week over an 18-week period. Staff member Barbara McKerley introduced the youngsters to the museum's permanent exhibits in art, science, music, and technology and to a temporary exhibit on whirligigs. Next, the group turned to hands-on activities: making dinosaurs out of chicken bones, erecting a city with K'NEX building pieces, and making, then playing, their own musical instruments.

In the second part of the program, local artists worked with the students on weaving and other crafts. The youngsters also took field trips to the Chattanooga Zoo, Tennessee Wildlife Center, and the High Museum of Art in Atlanta.

At the end of the semester, curators mounted a display of all the artwork done by Club Discovery. Museum staff and vision specialists from the local schools, who had coordinated

the program, joined with participants and their families at a closing reception to celebrate the youngsters' achievements.

To give the children ownership of the Creative Discovery Museum and to encourage them to return frequently, each received a family membership. The museum hopes to recruit some of the older Club Discovery

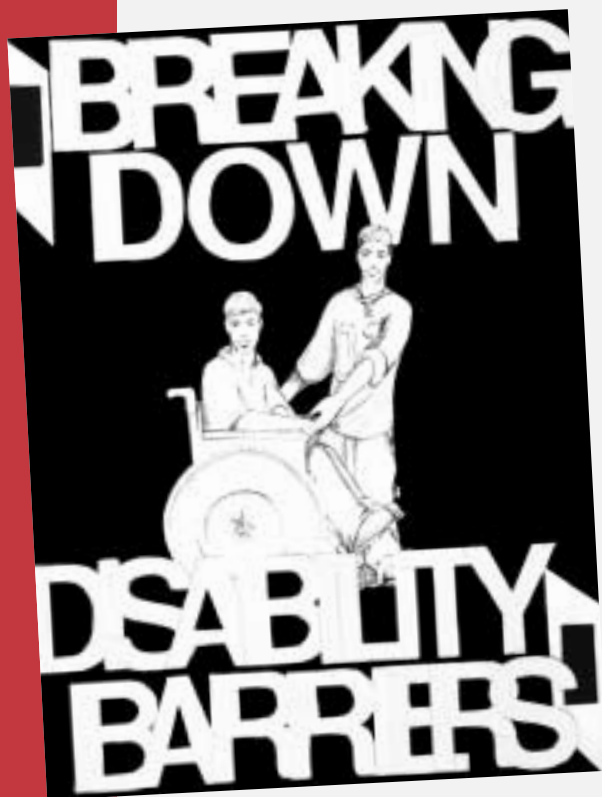
alumni to our Teen Volunteer program.

Club Discovery was generously supported by the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga. For more information about Club Discovery, contact Ms. Shannon Johnson, Creative Discovery Museum, 321 Chestnut St., Chattanooga, Tennessee 37402, telephone (423) 756-2738 or e-mail srj@cdmfun.org

Shannon Johnson is collaborations manager at the Creative Discovery Museum. She coordinated the Club Discovery program.

The Creative Discovery Museum's 2002 "Kids Like You-Kids Like Me" program will take place from October 12 to November 1st. There will be an exhibit, school tours and weekend activities. For more information, call the Creative Discovery Museum at 423-756-2738.

unclippedwingslands



(above) Cory Harkins, from Nashville's Antioch High School, received the best-of-show award for his grade level for this poster; entered in the Metropolitan Public School's 2001 Disability Awareness Art and Essay Contest. The annual event is sponsored by the Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities.

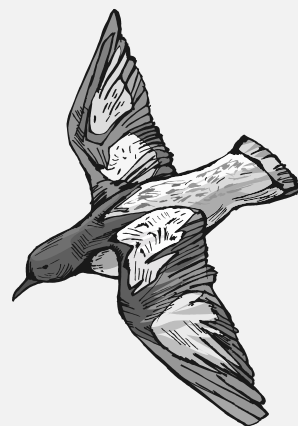
(right) This best-of-show poster from the same contest was the winner in the Middle School category. The artist is Aimee Robinson of Antioch Middle School.



Unclipped Wings

By Ramona Harvey

To soar on unclipped wings
Free of convention
gliding in a wind
of daydreams fulfilled
and unconditional love
which ties down nothing
but instead rises like helium
unconfined and untouched
by fear of failure or rejection
Be there no prisoners here
on unclipped wings
that move without effort or pain
acknowledging nothing
but the glory of existence
wanting nothing but to taste the sun
needing nothing but freedom
to dance as children do



on unclipped wings a feathered soul
gliding in the wind.

Ramona Harvey is senior career facilitator for Career Access Network, which assists people with disabilities in several midstate counties to find resources needed to gain employment. In June, Ramona volunteered her time as a lead counselor for the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum.

escape

Landscape

By Sonda M. Leonard

your finely manicured lawn glows a brilliant green
in the torrid Southern heat:
flora façade

I have watched you rage across your green acres
on an orange tractor,
playing part-time lord in overalls and a torn, white shirt,
your sweat stinking of anger,
rivulets running down a sun-browned face
twisted by the evil throbbing beneath your
blue bib pocket—
a sight that makes me cold inside

I can hear your anger at times,
words spat in the fragrance of the roses—
I think the petals might wilt with shame,
but they are seemingly stronger than the lady
of the manor,
who cowers beneath a wide-brimmed hat
and holds soiled hands to her face

and in this garden of pretense your ire grows
like some thorny, malevolent blossom
while I sit and pray for a drought

Sonda M. Leonard is a pre-press quality control specialist at a local printing company. She is currently preparing a collection of her poetry for publication.

Rapture

By Sonda M. Leonard

if you are coming soon,
could you please give us a bit of notice?
the misery is much down here
and faith is at an all-time low

we are even beginning to think we might
just have to save ourselves

perhaps my dreams foretell your advent—
visions of the eschaton in which we
re-bury the dead,
taking back your Lazarus feat—
dreams from which I awaken in darkness,
feeling around me for the freshly turned,
moist loam that certainly must be there,
awash with intermingled elation and despair

and if you do come,
let it be with loud triumph this time
and not through the loins of a virgin
your helplessness, meant to be an
example to us all,
would be improper at this point

we are all the wiser now
meekness having bought few wins

unclipped wings standscape

We Are the People

By John Mikkelsen

We are the people of the world with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities

We are the Senior and Elderly People with phenomenal wisdom

We are the American Commander-in-Chief who could not stand but who defeated the Axis Powers in World War II

We are the American Superman who leaps tall buildings in a single bound but can now barely move his head

We are the people referred to as Challenged, Gifted, Special, Handicapped, Tragic, Crippled, Retarded, and Slow

We are the American boxer who once said, "I am the greatest!" yet today cannot lift a coffee cup

We are the People who have our parental rights taken and children alienated because we use a scooter

We are the American Evangelist and Roman Catholic Pope who tremble when lifting our arms to praise God

We are the glamorous Miss Americas who are deaf but who have sex appeal to millions

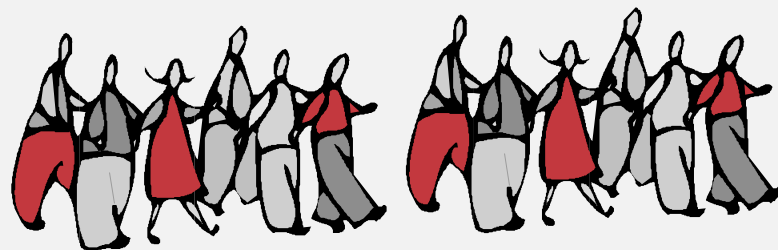
We are the American President and Actor who defeated Communism yet can't remember his name or yesterday

We are the 'Ironhorse' Ballplayer who once said, "Today I consider myself the luckiest man in the world"

We are the people with incredible love who are often rejected by people yet readily accepted by animals

We are the ultra-conservative Radio Host who has trouble hearing

We are the actors of America who are overweight or short but able to entertain millions



We are the people who go to the dollar movie and get told, "Cripples like you get in free" and "Please sit in the back of the theater"

We are the people with a dream that one day we'll be judged not by our condition and equipment but by the content of our character

We are the Men and Women misunderstood and overmedicated due to depression and anxiety

We are the American Basketball Player with "Magic" who has ADHD and AIDS

We are the people in checkout lines who get asked, "What's wrong with you? Were you in a motorcycle wreck?"

We are the people who deal with a severely impaired general public in how they perceive and react to our situations

We are the German scientist who flunked math and physics yet designed a "rocket to put mankind on the moon"

We are no different, because We are everyone, and We are You

Unless you experience sudden death or die in a terrorist attack, You will join our ranks

We are some of the Great People who have changed the course of the World

You will join us in one form or another at some time in Your life.

© Copyright 2002 by John Mikkelsen

John is originally from the Midwest but has been a resident of Knoxville for the past twenty-two years. Retired from TVA, John is presently developing a plan of treatment for his rare neuromuscular disorder and volunteers part-time at the Disability Resource Center. John is a strong advocate for independent living and the use of advanced technologies to compensate for a person's physical limitations.



Disabled

By Jessica Bean

Just because you are disabled does not
mean that you do not have feelings.
It does not mean that you cannot reach
for the ceiling.

Just because you are disabled does not
mean that you are not smart.
It does not mean that you are not
quick as a dart.

Just because you are disabled does not mean that
you are not sweet.
It does not mean that you can be beat.

Just because you are disabled does not mean that
you can't reach for the stars above.
But most of all it does not mean that you do not need
to feel loved.

Jessica Bean graduated from Halls High School, Knoxville, Tennessee, this past spring. She was a student delegate to this year's Youth Leadership Forum, sponsored by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

My Place

By Spencer Jackson

Through the trees
Through the leaves
Through the upper sky
Flows the soft and gentle breeze
Flying higher than high.
I have a place
found beyond the boundaries of life—
A place where there is neither grief
nor pain nor strife.

This place is white—beyond imagination.
A place I go to escape the world...
Its pain, its suffering, its condemnation.
In this place there is a Man,
A Man who looks inside.
He sees the good in everyone,
And the bad they try to hide.
He takes my hand and guides me,
Leads me to his throne...
He holds my hand with warmth and love
so I know I'm not alone.
Now I return to this world
And strive to follow Him.
And when I fail to do my best
I'll visit Him again!

Spencer Jackson is a rising 11th grader at Tullahoma High School, Tullahoma, Tennessee. He was a student delegate to the 2002 Youth Leadership Forum of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

When Youthful Fancies Yield to Real Dreams

By Christy Wells-Reece

Think back for a moment to when you were really young. Remember what it was like to plan your future? There were so many possibilities, so much potential. Do I want to be a doctor, maybe a lawyer? How about being the first female president? The list of accomplishments that we would strive for were endless!

And then, of course, you dreamed of the man that you would marry. He would be tall, rich, and handsome and, of course, he would support everything that you wanted out of life. He would rub your feet at the end of a long, hard day, have dinner delivered, and run you a hot bubble bath. Life will be wonderful and always full of surprises, or so you thought.

Then reality set in. Your dream of being president turned into being the vice president of the PTA. The tall, rich, handsome husband that you waited for? Well, five feet eight isn't really all that short. And they can do wonders now for male pattern baldness. And just because his idea of a bubble bath doesn't exactly include adding Mr. Bubble to running water doesn't mean that life is a total loss. You still have those little surprises that you can count on, right?

When you thought of surprises in life they probably included teal colored boxes with white ribbons or two tickets to some far away, romantic island where tan, glistening Latino men named Juan and Carlos would wait on you hand and foot, eager to jump at your every whim.

Back in reality, those little surprises were more like being kicked out of the public library because your kids wanted every book, except the 15 that you just spent the last hour letting

them pick out. Or maybe spending six hours in the emergency room, thinking that you are having a heart attack, having every test known to man run on you only to find out that it is

actually an allergic reaction to the cheap bracelet that your husband bought for you at a truck stop on the way home, when he realized that he had forgotten your birthday, AGAIN!

Face it. Life doesn't always turn out the way you planned it. At times you are thankful for that. Remember that guy you thought you were going to marry in high school? Okay, so he grew up to be tall, rich and handsome. But is he truly happy? Well, he is truly happy, but he would have been much happier traveling the globe and spending his millions with you by his side. It's

his loss. Just keep reminding yourself of that. Have it stitched on a pillow if it helps.

But there are some surprises in life that you couldn't imagine. Like the first time that you look into that special someone's eyes and you realize that he is the one and having to remember to breathe. How about the first time your child looks into your eyes and a smile spreads across his little face because he knows that he is safe, loved and blessed to have you as a mommy. What about the surprise of how you felt the first day of school, when you found that your little girl wasn't upset at all about you leaving her there. You were a blithering idiot in the car, using up an entire box of tissues. Then you looked around and all the other minivans in the parking lot had moms in them, looking for one more box of tissues under the front seat, and you knew that you were not alone.



Photo by Christy Wells-Reece

And in that moment it came to you that the reason she could let go of your hand was because she knows you will never let go of her heart. That little angel knows that when the time comes, you will be there to admire her first masterpiece that she made at school. She knows that the first time her little heart is broken by the boy she sits next to her in Sunday school, you will make her chocolate chip cookies because every good heartache deserves chocolate. And she knows that when she starts to dream about her future, you will be there to help her believe in those tall, rich, handsome men and those careers choices that range from cowgirl to astronaut. She wasn't actually letting you go, she was taking

you with her. You were there in every confident step that she took, every new friend that she made and every new task that she conquered.

And you didn't let go of those dreams you used to have for your life. They just changed to wonders that you could never have even dreamed of. Here's to your future!

Christy D. Wells-Reece is the mother of a child with learning disabilities as well as having a disability herself. Her passions are her family, photography and fighting for disability rights.

All of the subjects involved in these photos have some disability. Christy writes, "Although some disabilities are visible and some are not, everyone should be respected for who they are and not discounted because of their perceived limitations."



Photos by Christy Wells-Reece



yield to real dreams

Outreach is the Focus at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts

By Anne Henderson



Suppose you envision a new initiative in Nashville to engage people in the visual arts through educational programs and exhibitions in ways that cause them to look at their world differently.

How do you plan for this undertaking? What do you do to connect to the community? Who can help you make this vision a reality?

If you are working with the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, you begin planning and talking with the community years before opening the institution. Through the Frist Foundation, the initial staff of the Frist Center met with community organizations, artists, educational groups, and arts advocates throughout the city. Through a series of focus group discussions, the mission of the Frist Center was begun. Today, the mission statement is:

To stimulate and nourish appreciation for, understanding of, and creativity in the visual arts among all the people of Nashville and its visitors through educational programs and community outreach efforts built on high quality exhibitions.

How do you make the Center accessible to everyone? Various constituents were identified through the focus groups. These organizations

met during the early planning stages with Frist Center staff to discuss issues of accessibility. As the Frist Center took shape and the plans for programs evolved, representatives from the commu-

nity, including the John F. Kennedy Center, were invited to participate in the Center's Outreach and Education Councils. These Councils also included representatives from United Way, Metro Parks and Recreation, Lloyd C. Elam Mental Health Center, Council on Aging, and Nashville Public Libraries. Working with organizations that have the capacity to reach Nashville's many and varied communities has always been a focus of the Frist Center, and these Councils provide input to the development of the Frist Center Outreach and Education Programs.

The Outreach and Education Outreach initiatives of the Center, through the work of Adelaide Vienneau, Community Relations Manager, and Susie Elder, Educator for



ArtQuest, the interactive education gallery, provides 31 different hands-on opportunities for visitors.

fristcenterforthevisual

Clients of the Rochelle Center, Nashville, enjoy a visit to the Frist Center.



Outreach, have sought to serve a wide audience. For the community with disabilities, this has been facilitated by a partnership with the Tennessee Disability Coalition. Through this organization, the Frist Center has worked with the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee, the League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Susan Gray School at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University, Four by Two, Guide Dog Users of Middle Tennessee, and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Representatives from these organizations participate regularly in the education program for Frist Center volunteers and in staff development programs. Frist Center volunteers (currently over 400 participants) have trained with representatives from the Coalition to better understand and serve Frist Center patrons with disabilities.

Invited prior to opening the Frist Center, members of the Tennessee Disability Coalition toured the building with staff to ensure the building's accessibility and heighten the staff's sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities. This valuable input allowed the staff to make adjustments and anticipate the needs of visitors with disabilities.

The staff is concerned not only with issues of accessibility of the

building, but also accessibility of the programs. The Frist Center has adapted tours for groups from Metro Parks and Recreation Disability program, the Rochelle Center, and Mur-Ci Homes. This summer, Susie Elder is working with Susan Eaton and Explorers Unlimited, a program for individuals with Down syndrome, to develop a multiple-visit program for participants. The Frist Center staff regularly contacts The League for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to provide sign interpreters for tours when requested.

From the outset, the founders of the Frist Center for the Visual Arts have said publicly and privately that the Frist Center exists to serve all of the people of this community. That means accessibility... economic, geographic, intellectual and physical. It's a word that is heard often at the Center.

Art is a powerful force and a valuable tool, and we are learning every single day how art can change lives. We look forward to new opportunities.

Anne Henderson is director of education at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, overseeing all educational programs offered to the public.

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About the Council:

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities provides leadership to ensure independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the community through promotion of systems change.

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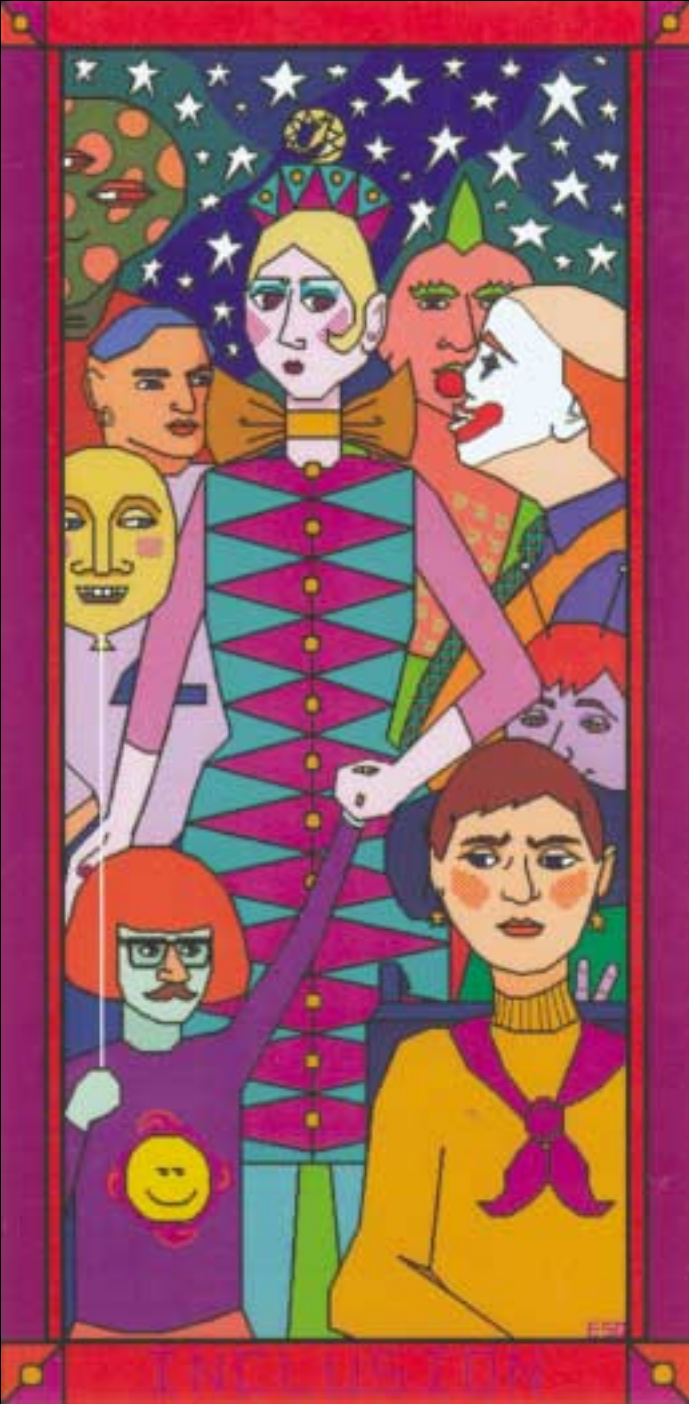
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